

# BODY SHAPE: THE TRANSITION FROM AN INHERITED EXISTENCE TO A PERSONAL EXISTENCE

## 2018 Biosynthesis Conference

### Introduction

I would like to talk to you about body shape. In the womb, and even before being in the womb, and after we are born, we adapt to our mother. We adapt to her feelings, to the way she exists in the world, the way she perceives the world and the way she relates to us. This is natural, and necessary for survival. When I speak about adaptation, I do not only mean psychological adaptation, but rather an adaptation that involves the body-mind. I perceive it as an unconscious, internal body shape that adapts to our mother's shape. Biosynthesis gives the client the possibility to bring that shape to consciousness and become an active participant to the transformation of that shape into a body shape that will be more attuned to their essence.

### Are we separate entities?

Our western culture has long viewed the individual as a separate entity, defined by its somatic boundaries and clearly distinguished from the external environment. In accordance with this philosophical model, psychoanalysis initially focused on the conflicts that take place inside the individual, between his impulses and the requirements of our "civilized" society to repress them. Gradually, the focus shifted and emphasis was given to the interaction between the individual and his environment. Object Relations Theory, and later Attachment Theory recognized the role of the environment in shaping the individual.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the concept of the individual as a separate entity started to shift. Various philosophical trends started viewing the person as intimately connected to his environment. For example Martin Buber<sup>1</sup> conceptualized the notion of "I" as existing only within an "I-Thou" or "I-It" relationship. He stated that "I-Thou" is a relationship that focuses on the mutual holistic existence of two people.

In the field of psychology Kurt Lewin<sup>2</sup> created the *psychic field theory*, and studied the interdependence between the person and his social environment.

Accordingly, Gregory Bateson has stated that an object is defined in function of its relationships to other objects. In other words, he made clear that man cannot be

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<sup>1</sup> Buber, M. (2010). *I and Thou*. Mansfield Center CT 06250 USA: Martino Publishing

<sup>2</sup> Lewin, K. (1935). *A dynamic theory of personality; selected papers*, New York and London: McGraw-Hill Book Company.

studied separately from his environment and does not actually exist as an entity outside it.<sup>3</sup>

As the previous paradigm started to shift, it has now become part of our mainstream knowledge that people do not exist in a vacuum. Our existence is connected to our environment, i.e., our family, but also the country we live in, the culture we are born into, and the era in which we live.

The individual is not therefore a separate entity with clearly defined boundaries. He is not only created by his environment but takes part in shaping it, and to a very large extent he is a part of this environment, and at the same time his environment is part of him.

### **The nature of what we call Self**

Being part of our environment, influenced and shaped by it, while at the same time taking part in the shaping of this environment, leads to a different conception of the nature of what we call “I” or “self”. Instead of a stable and clearly defined self, we are discovering that the “self” could be more flexible and fluid, much more influenced by the environment, and much more likely to change.

Certain psychotherapeutic approaches have based their theories on this fluid perception of the self. For example, in Gestalt theory, Perls, Hefferline and Goodman, (in their book “Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality”, 1951), conceptualized the Self more as a process that occurs in space and time, and less as a stable and concrete entity, or an object. In this theory the Self is seen as a process that is shaped in relation to the environment, and therefore constantly changing.<sup>4</sup> Reading an article on Relational Body Psychotherapy, I came across a definition by Rolef Ben-Shahar: he considers the Self a stable personal object and an ongoing process that is related to the environment at the same time.<sup>5</sup> I tend to agree with that description.

So we could say that we are something personal, stable and recognizable as “I” and at the same time something that is in constant interaction with the environment, part of a relationship.

This has important implications both for conceptualizing how we develop as individuals, and for the possibilities that Body Psychotherapy can offer.

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<sup>3</sup> **Bateson, G. (1972).** *Steps to an ecology of mind; collected essays in anthropology, psychiatry, evolution and epistemology.* San Francisco: Chandler Pub.

<sup>4</sup> **Perls, F., Hefferline, R., Goodman, P., (1994).** *Gestalt Therapy: excitement and growth in the human personality.* Gouldsboro ME: The Gestalt Journal Press, Inc.

<sup>5</sup> **Ben-Shahar, R. (2012).** In: *About Relational Body Psychotherapy*, Edited by Young, C., Scottish Borders: Body Psychotherapy Publications.

## **Connection to the mother**

Being interconnected and shaped by the environment is particularly true during life in the womb and early infancy. The mother-infant relationship is therefore central in shaping us and making us who we are.

Our life begins even before we find ourselves in our mother's womb. It begins with our mother's intentions, dreams, imagination and expectations. A woman might want a baby in order not to feel lonely, or because she feels that she has something to offer to another human being, or she might not want a baby at all. In this sense our life is inevitably shaped by her intention. I would like to give an example of the impact this intention can have on a person. A client of mine was complaining about the fact that responsibilities weigh very heavily on her. When I asked her to show me how her body organized itself in order to undertake these responsibilities, she made her left-hand palm into a fist, and she covered it with her right-hand palm. She said that this showed the way her cells were organized, in order for her to take responsibilities upon herself. After a while I encouraged her to experiment in lifting her right-hand palm. She did so and turned her palm upside down opened it and explored the space around her with it. Gradually, she realized that this organization was a result of her mother's intention for her. Her mother had a very specific intention with regard to the baby she wanted to bring into the world. My client told me: "My mother wanted a baby for this (she joined her left-hand thumb and index and then moved her two fingers in a very determined manner)". What she meant was that her mother had a very strong, very clear, and extremely narrow intention with regard to the baby she wanted to bring into the world: she wanted a child that would take her responsibilities upon himself. I urged to open her fingers. We did so and she started exploring the space around her and she realized that life offered a very large number of possibilities of existence, something that she could not see before. She realized that she hadn't taken advantage of these possibilities and that she was unconsciously focused on a very specific and narrow way of existing.

My client realized that her psychological and somatic organization actually served her mother's original intention for her, instead of promoting her own existence.

Our connection to the mother continues in the womb. In the womb the fetus receives a whole range of biochemical signals from the mother, mainly hormones, neurotransmitters and nutrients and these provide information with regard to the conditions in which she lives, the outside world and the way she perceives it. For example, the quantity and quality of nutrients that are available to the mother, provide information to her fetus, about the availability (or lack of) food in the

mother's life. A frightened mother will transmit to her fetus the message that the world is dangerous.<sup>6</sup>

In this way, the fetus communicates "chemically" with his mother. Her perception of the world becomes his, and his sensations and feelings are adapted accordingly.

The mother's perception of the environment is chemically transmitted to the fetus through the placenta, the cellular barrier between maternal and fetal blood. The placenta is the somatic aspect of the connectedness between mother and fetus. It is an organ that is actually shared by the mother's and fetus's body for the duration of the pregnancy. For nine months, mother and fetus share a body. *"We have a shared body before we develop a differentiated individuated body."* (Ben-Shahar, 2013, p.133).

After we are born, the connection with the mother continues through her physical and psychological contact with us. The mother, or whoever is the primary caretaker of the infant, is essential not only for his development, but for his physical survival and the expression of his potential.

Human babies are born with a genetic blueprint and with a unique range of possibilities. Their body is programmed to develop in certain ways, and certain systems are ready to function at birth. However, there are many systems that are incomplete, and cannot be activated and developed without the assistance of adult humans.

Winnicott expresses this reality with his own words: *"The inherited potential of an infant cannot become an infant unless linked to maternal care"* (Winnicott, 1960, p. 588). *"there is no such a thing as an infant... If you set out to describe a baby you will find you are describing a baby and someone. A baby cannot exist alone but is essentially part of a relationship."* (Winnicott, 1966).

In other words, at the beginning of our life we do not exist as separate entities, and this is true for the psychological aspect, but also for the somatic aspect of our existence. Both psychologically and somatically, we depend on the primary caretaker for the completion of our development.

Allan Schore emphasizes the role of the right hemisphere in the intensity of the connection between mother and infant. The right hemisphere, (the hemisphere that has to do with intuition, symbolism, imagination and a holographic view of reality), is dominant in the first years of life. Right hemisphere dominance at the beginning of life, plays an important role in the way a baby connects with his mother, and contributes to the initial interconnectedness between mother and baby.

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<sup>6</sup> Gerhardt, S., (2004). *Why love matters: How affection shapes a baby's brain*. Hove, East Sussex: Brunner-Routledge.

Moreover, always according to Allan Schore, the right hemisphere is connected to both the sympathetic nervous system which activates energy, and the parasympathetic nervous system which helps calming the system down. It is also connected to stimuli that a person receives from the outside world, but also to stimuli that come from inside. So, it is responsible for sensitivity with regard to what is happening outside and inside, and at the same time for the nervous system's reaction to what is happening. In other words, it is responsible for the baby's perception and adaptation to the conditions he will find himself in.

The baby's dominant right hemisphere resonates with the mother's right hemisphere which becomes more sensitized during that period. Mother and baby communicate through their right hemispheres and that means that the baby is particularly sensitive to the mother's emotional state, and to the emotional messages she sends. The mother communicates with her baby through the quality of eye contact, through slight movements of her body and her hands, the quality of her touch etc.<sup>7</sup>

So, mother and infant exist in a common psychological space that has been called an intersubjective space. In this space, the baby is immersed in his mother's way of perceiving the world: for example, he will perceive the world as dangerous or safe, hostile or friendly, easy or hard to live in etc. In this space the baby will also make his first experience of a relationship. The quality of this relationship, the mother's emotional situation and her way of perceiving the world, will contribute in shaping a person's sense of self, his place in the world, his ability to self-regulate, his ability to understand the internal world of others, and will also form an unconscious template for relating.

Stanley Keleman describes this connection from a different angle. I quote: *"A child is connected with the mother through... [vibration, pulsation and streaming]. As he develops his own boundaries and his own pulsating, he begins to expand and extend himself away from the mother. He extends himself and reconnects, extends himself and reforms his relationships and his self. In this way bit by bit, he acquires his personality."* (Keleman, 1985, p.37).

At the beginning of life the boundaries between mother and infant are not clearly defined. They are interconnected in the womb, and at birth there gradually starts a process of differentiation that continues through life.

## **Mind is the Brain-Body**

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<sup>7</sup> From **Allan Schore's** lecture at the International Biosynthesis Congress, Lisbon 2006.

We usually associate intelligence or the mind, thoughts, emotions and the unconscious with the brain. There is a very strongly held belief that all intelligence resides in the brain.

Candace Pert, in her book *Molecules of Emotion*, gives a vivid illustration of how what we call mind is intricately connected to the function and organization of internal organs and the body in general: it is not an abstract notion that is disconnected from the body. In her view the physical aspect of the mind is not the brain alone, but the body and the brain as a whole. She describes the immaterial aspect of the mind as a network that is responsible for the flow of information – the information that originates both in the outside world and the interior of the organism – from one part of the organism to another. So the mind as brain-body is an intelligence that links every organ, every cell, and the body as a whole, and in this way organizes life. The way our body functions and organizes itself IS THE MIND.

In her words: “...I like to speculate that what the mind is, is the flow of information as it moves among the cells, organs and systems of the body...The mind as we experience it, is immaterial, yet it has a physical substrate, which is both the body and the brain. It may also be said to have a nonmaterial, nonphysical substrate that has to do with the flow of that information. The mind, then, is what holds the network together, often acting below our consciousness, linking and coordinating the major systems and their organs and cells in an intelligently orchestrated symphony of life. Thus, we might refer to the whole system as a psychosomatic information network, linking **psyche**, which comprises all that is of an ostensibly nonmaterial nature such as mind, emotion and soul, to **soma**, which is the material world of molecules, cells and organs Mind and body, psyche and soma” (Pert,1999, p.185).

The mind then, links and coordinates systems and their organs and cells. Emotions and thoughts together with the function of organs, and the internal and external movements of the body all belong together, function together in a coordinated system. Thoughts, sensations and emotions are automatically translated into internal and external body movements, and in this way contribute to the organization of body forms and shapes.

Our psychological birth and development is not only a mental, abstract affair. It is also very much a bodily affair. In the womb, our experience is not only an experience connected to feelings, but also to the senses and the body.

So the adaptation that we make to handle the conditions that we encounter in our early life is not only immaterial: it is both immaterial and physical, psychological and somatic at the same time. And as such, it involves the formation and deconstruction of body forms and shapes.

### **How does co-existence with the mother affect us?**

In the co-existence between mother and child, the child is the one who will adapt and attune, to a much bigger extent, to the mother's emotional state, her perception of the outside world, her way of coping with various situations, her pattern of relating, to her vibration, pulsation and streaming.

He will adopt a body shape that promotes survival.

### **Body Shape**

In the course of my practice I have seen that my clients often refer to the way they feel in terms of body, (for example "I feel as if I have a tombstone on my chest"), and often in terms of body shape. Sometimes I ask them to describe the body shape they adopt when they find themselves in a certain situation. For example, a client of mine described her practical, efficient, left hemisphere, rigid side, as a stone with rounded edges that was however made of concrete. Her artistic, sentimentally softer, right hemisphere side was described as the egg of an ostrich, filled with straw, which could crack at mere touch.

When I think about shape, I refer on the one hand to the shape of the physical body, i.e., stature, and on the other hand to a subtler, not immediately tangible and often unconscious way of existing in the world. I would describe it as an internal depiction of the position a person holds in the world, or the position he holds with regard to a particular situation. Stanley Keleman describes it eloquently: "*The brain records what state a person is in and creates an image of it*". (Keleman, 1969, p. 10). "*The subjective somatic self starts with an inner image*." (Keleman, 1969, p. 4).

We live in a pulsating universe, where all organic matter pulsates, organizes and deconstructs, creates forms and then flows in a never ending continuum. As part of the universe we take part in this pulsation, organizing our reality in forms and then deconstructing these forms.

Stanley Keleman describes this universal pulsation when he speaks about life in the womb: in the womb, we have an impulse for excitation, expansion and growing, and at the same time we have an autonomous self-inhibiting that does not allow excitation and expansion to be unbounded. There is therefore, an alternation of expansion and self-inhibiting. Expansion is an essential part of the human condition, it has to do with growth and with meeting the outside world, but putting a boundary to this expansion is equally essential: without a boundary expansion would become endless and shapeless.

The alternation of excitation and self-inhibiting is the beginning of the formation of a container and at the same time of a boundary for our sensations. We could say that

it is the beginning of the formation of a body shape. As we create a bodily form, we are forming at the same time our awareness, our individuality, a sense of self. So psychological development is intrinsically connected to body shape.

This psychological and-at-the-same-time-bodily development continues outside the womb. Stanley Keleman describes it very vividly: *“Attitudes have muscular, emotional, and mental components. The patterns of our excitement manifest themselves as action, as feeling and as thinking.”* (Keleman, 1985, p. 54). *“We generally think of an attitude as a mental set. An attitude is a bodily set. Our attitudes are the framework of our form.”* (Keleman, 1985, p. 54). *“The shape that a person has organized represents the way he feels about himself. This understanding is at the groundfloor of somatic work.”* (Keleman, 1969, p. 27).

The conditions the individual encounters at the beginning of his life can be very different: when excitation and expansion are accepted and supported, the person will be able to surpass his boundaries and reach out to the world. His body will be relaxed, and his movements free and graceful. When they are inhibited the person will lead a constricted life, within a constricted body, i.e., a body that is tense and does not move freely. Muscles might be clenched in the hands, the jaw, chest, belly and legs. The person might be mistrustful, with a tendency to hold on to conditions that feel safe, and a fear of the unknown. On the other hand, excitation can also be unbounded, in which case there is no sufficient differentiation between the person and the outside world.

Self-inhibiting can be a growth promoting function, meant to contain excitation, or a limiting function which inhibits spontaneous expression and development.

In Biosynthesis we speak of motoric fields: they are natural biologically existing patterns in the body whose function is to respond to the demands of development. They are activated in the process of a well attuned upbringing. When conditions are not favorable, these patterns are inhibited.<sup>8</sup> But even if they are inhibited they do not disappear: they remain dormant and can be activated when the appropriate conditions occur in later life. So we could say that the body has a normal tendency to move and shape itself in a particular way, as a person develops, but will not succeed in doing so if conditions are unfavourable.

The conditions that we encounter at the beginning of our life, both inside and outside the womb, cause us to take a specific form or shape, which is connected to a specific way of existing in the world. For example a fetus can retreat and shrink if he happens to encounter toxic conditions, or he can shield himself to avoid something that he will perceive as an attack. He can split in order to deal with a traumatic

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<sup>8</sup> **Boadella, D. (2006).** *Shape Postures and Postures of the Soul: The Biosynthesis Concept of Motoric Fields. The USA Body Psychotherapy Journal*, 5:53-65.



situation that he cannot contain, or create a rigid and impermeable boundary in order to contain his unbounded and unformed impulses. Excitation and self-inhibiting, the formation of flexible or rigid boundaries, or the lack of boundaries, all result in a specific body shape. Rolef Ben-Shahar sums it up in a very concise way: *"We make life shapes through cellular, muscular, neural and structural dynamics, mediating between inside and outside."* (Ben-Shahar 2013, p. 160). Stanley Keleman also describes this process: *"Each response calls forth a change in shape, to freeze, to become active, to increase activity or to contain activity."* (Keleman, 1969, p. 5).

Our body shape is formed through indiscernible muscular movements, like tightening of the muscles, directing one's gaze inwards or outwards, the inhibition of impulses, muscle tone, a rigid, collapsed or relaxed posture, bending of the neck in a submissive stance or holding the neck up in a provocative stance splitting between the right and left or the upper and lower side of the body, etc. Body shape can be transformed many times in the course of our life (or so we hope) so as to become a shape that is more in accordance to our personal potential, and less an adaptation to co-existence with the environment and more specifically, the mother.

The first, automatic, social body shape (the shape that we create in order to adapt to coexistence with the mother) often prevents the growth, the support and the expression of our core qualities. Each one of us is unique and has come to this world with his own energy flow, his own pulsation and vibration. In order to live a meaningful life and fulfill our potential, we will have to initially recognize, and then support, our personal life expression. The automatic body shape, can distort a person to such an extent that he can become unable to recognize certain of his qualities, or he can recognize them but perceive them in a negative light. He can become unable to recognize his wishes, his need to put boundaries, or the direction he wants to take in his life.

Translating an article by David Boadella some time ago, I came across a quotation that he makes by Kurtz and Pretera, which in my opinion describes in a very eloquent way how the core can become distorted and what happens to the person when it does:

*"At birth the internal cylinder or core is present but not developed. If the environment is favorable the person develops a solid core, but if the affective and spiritual growth is inhibited or distorted, the core is experienced as absent or insufficient."*

*"If one views this in structural terms, the core is the internal pillar of support...the external layer is formed in relation with the development of the core. When the core is formed the external layer is built on the core without pressure. When [the core] is weak the external layer is either not developed at all, in which case we have an*

*underfed, insufficiently developed individual, or... the external laywe is excessively developed in an attempt to contain one's structure or to maintain it in a certain cohesion."* (Kutz, 1976).<sup>9</sup>

Our automatic shape seems to be the mold of how we are positioned in the world, a mold that will later be the basis of the way events in our life will unfold. Around that mold we will form our basic beliefs with regard to who we are, what we are worth, how we view other people around us what is possible or impossible. The aim of psychotherapy would be to make that shape conscious and bring it lose to our original potential.

### Examples

1. A 35 year old woman, who is attractive and successful, but has great difficulty in forming a lasting love relationship, came to one session feeling very upset because of a highly unsatisfactory relationship with a younger man. While she had managed to go through periods of indifference towards him, that day she felt that she had relapsed, she felt rejected, but she could not let him go. When I asked to take a body shape that corresponded to how she felt towards him, she took the posture of a young girl, with her hands outstretched in front of her like she was hugging someone. She explained that in this posture she felt like a very lonely and unloved child, and she sensed that this was also true of her boyfriend. With her hands she was trying to protect and comfort him. This body shape shows a person who was unloved as child, and has adopted a pattern of trying to comfort others (probably hoping that they will comfort her in return) instead of protecting and comforting herself. She has relinquished the responsibility of comforting herself to other people.

We discussed the possibility of concentrating on herself and of taking care and comforting herself. She realized that this was impossible because she would be left completely alone, no one would come to her. I then asked her to try to concentrate on herself for the next 10 minutes only. I also put my hand on her arm, lightly, so that she would feel that there was someone there for her. At first she realized how lonely and frightened she had been as a child. *"My father just stood there and stared at me without coming to me, and my mother was aggressive towards me"* she said. She was gradually able to take in my presence and touch, and she started feeling less desperate and felt the need to embrace herself with her arms. This was perhaps a beginning of self comforting.

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<sup>9</sup> Boadella, D. (2006). *Organ Systems and Lifestyles. The USA Body Psychotherapy Journal*, 5-34-52.

2. A 35 year old man, has difficulty at work. His superior is never satisfied with his work, even though he feels that he is quite good at his job. He has tried to discuss the issue with him but he doesn't give him a reason for his dissatisfaction and nothing changes. When is asked my client to think of how he organizes his body shape when he is with his superior, he bends his torso and puts his arms in front of him in round shape. He tells me that his shape is rounded, because any edges that might stick out of his body will be viciously attacked and cut off. Being rounded is a protection against such an attack. He realizes that the anticipated attacks are criticism from his superior.
3. A 42 year old man, married with two children. When he came to therapy he had very little work, earned very little money and was often violent with his wife and eldest son, shouting, banging doors etc. During therapy it became obvious that his main problem was that he didn't know and could not support who he really was, what he believed, what he liked or disliked. His core was weak and not recognized by him. He described himself as a chameleon. This resulted in extremely low self esteem, that at first he could not even admit to himself. Unable to cope with the responsibility of having a family, and handle his feeling of insufficiency, he was often violent. Gradually he was able to admit that he was violent, and how badly he felt about himself. He started to support his core, and that made him feel slightly better about himself. This is how he described the change: *"Before I was like air. I would go right and left, to many different realities, and I felt lost. Now there is something more solid here (and he showed his stomach). I have a self and I can go back to it. Now I am the gravity and these (other people's ideas and opinions) follow me. Before, they were the gravity, and I had substance through them."*
4. A 40 year old woman came to the session complaining that even though she had gone to the countryside with her daughter during the weekend, she did not stop thinking about a colleague that she likes. She is not in a relationship with him. The description of her body shape was that of a rag doll with a very big belly like a bubble, while her head, her hands and her legs were not formed, they were just pieces of rag. Her belly was filled with cotton. She felt that the doll was not alive and could not move its head, hands and legs. It was pinned down and immobilized. She felt that the cotton symbolized a feeling of emptiness, which in turned made her think obsessively about her colleague. I made her concentrate on herself, on her existence, on her breathing and we did some grounding exercises. After a while she felt that her hands, feet and head had been transformed and were now made of plastic, and her belly was smaller.
5. A 56 year old woman came to the session complaining that she often found herself waiting for other people to make a move that would make her feel that they loved her or move in a direction that she needed them to move,

and was always disappointed. She gave me an example of a friend of hers who had promised that they would work together in September, but when the time came her friend was extremely nice to her, but did not mention anything about working with her. Another example was her boyfriend who said he loved her but did not seem to try to make room for them to meet as often as she would like. She described her body shape as melting. She felt like the small girl that she had been, waiting for her father to play with her as he had promised, a promise that he did not keep. I asked her to find a movement that would make her feel better. She was able to move her hands upwards, but she wouldn't move the rest of her body or her legs. She felt that she was in the water and could not go up to the surface. Her legs felt much smaller than the rest of her body. I saw her body shape as the depiction of a passive attitude and as a difficulty in taking responsibility with regard to what she wants, a fact that puts her in a position of waiting for other to give her what she needs, and being frustrated when that doesn't happen.

6. The case of a young girl of 27. When she came to therapy she was frightened of being alone, she was hypochondriac and her life in general was very controlled and limited, a fact that reflected her childhood with her mother. She had lived in a very silent home, where everything was in perfect order, but without much feeling. She left her mother's home when she was 18. She described her life as being *"small boxes, that were in perfect order"* meaning that every issue, person, or event in her life was carefully thought of, put in a certain category. Moving something from one category to another was difficult and caused her anxiety. In her love relationships she chose men that she could control, men who had very little space for expressing themselves, who actually did not exist and of whom she grew bored after a while. Gradually her need for control was reduced and she started a relationship with someone who had more presences and more substance.

One day she came to the session very anxious because her boyfriend was planning to stop working with his father and look for another job, a fact that made her feel that the routine of the relationship might be disturbed. She described her body as follows: *"my cells are moving in a disorderly way and stick to the walls of my body"*. This is the body shape of a person that has great difficulty in self regulating. With the help of grounding and breathing she managed to visualize her cells in a more normal flow, and in this way to calm herself.

## Relationships and Form

According to Object Relations Theory, when we relate to other people we tend to reproduce the pattern of relating that we have unconsciously adopted with the significant people in our lives. According to Fairbairn, the reaction of the infant to external circumstances shape his intra-psychic structure.<sup>10</sup> The infant internalizes his relationships with important people in his life and later reproduces these internalized relationships with other people he will encounter.

If we add the dimension of shape to the term intra-psychic structure, we can speak of an internalized relational organization, an internalized body shape that will be transferred into new relationships. As I have already mentioned, we could call this shape automatic or social, in the sense that it is an automatic reaction to the circumstances we originally found ourselves in.

When describing the way we relate to other people, David Boadella speaks of relational forms. In his words: *“As soon as we enter a relationship, however simple it may be, we inevitably position ourselves in the relationship in accordance with our previous relational forms.”* (Boadella, 1992; Pulver, 1963).

We carry our early forms of attachment, our original automatic shape, everywhere and so do other people. We could say that present relationships put us in an internal conflict between the impulse to reproduce the automatic, early acquired form, and the need to respond to the present reality with a form that will be more appropriate to it. So when two people relate to each other, this can be viewed as the meeting of two bodily organizations, two body shapes which can be rigid, in the sense that they will automatically organize in their original form, or they can be more flexible and organize in accordance to the present situation. In most cases they will go back and forth, between an organization that adequately responds to the present situation, and a tendency to slip back to automatic shapes.

The forms of those who relate to each other, interact and constantly shape each other. Depending on how flexible or rigid these organized shapes are, they can co-create a constantly moving and changing dance, or remain in a static coexistence of two relatively rigid shapes with little hope of constructive interaction.

Original shapes are often complementary. For example, a person whose shape occupies very little space will tend to relate to a person whose shape, on the contrary, occupies a lot of space. This arrangement might work for a while, or might even work for ever. Problems will arise if one, or both persons gradually transform their bodily organization and move to different shapes, and in this way become less complementary and less compatible. For example, if the person that occupies very

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<sup>10</sup> Fairbairn, W.R.D., (1951). *A synopsis of the author's views regarding the structure of the personality.* In: *An Object Relations Theory of Personality*. New York: Routledge.

little space tries to occupy more space, he might become incompatible with his more expansive partner.

In this context, the aim of couples' therapy would be the identification of patterns of relating and of the organized forms that these patterns have created and assistance in safe experimentation with other possible forms.

In this way something new can be created, something that is not there at the beginning of therapy. I am often surprised by the new forms adopted by couples that have previously been in trouble, forms that create new realities, new possibilities of coexistence that were not at all visible at the beginning when the clients first came to therapy.

### **Enter Biosynthesis**

We could view the course of our lives and what we are trying to do in psychotherapy as a transition from a dyadic, adapted, automatic and social shape, to a more personal shape a shape that reflects and supports our core. It is a process of distancing ourselves from the original shape that we have had to take in order to adapt ourselves and survive, and gradually being able to identify, support and make space for who we really are.

In this context, the aim of body psychotherapy would be to help clients identify their unconscious shapes and make them conscious participants in the transformation of these shapes. In this process, rigid forms can become more flexible, and polarization can be replaced by fluidity. The awareness that shapes can be transformed and the ability to deconstruct existing forms and reorganize into new ones is extremely important.

This process begins with making somatic processes more conscious: for example, one can become conscious of small muscular movements, of the inhibition of impulses, the absence of boundaries, or the existence of boundaries that are too rigid, etc.

Awareness of somatic processes gives the client the possibility to transform his shape in the direction that he wants. The therapist while being supportive of the old forms, can suggest experimentation with alternatives.

Experimentation can be something simple like turning one's gaze that is usually turned inwards, towards the outside world, or making a new movement, slowing down a movement in order to explore the feelings that accompany it, etc. Exploration of new possible shapes can help the client experiment with alternative ways of existing, and tap into his dormant potential and in this way help him restore his original biological patterns of body organization.

Alternative body postures or shapes will give the client the possibility to explore his feelings in these potential realities. In this way he will be able to choose the body organization (and therefore psychological organization, the thought patterns and the patterns of relating) in which he wants to exist.

### **Exercise**

In couples. Think of a person with whom you have a difficult relationship that makes you feel bad. Imagine that this person is now in front of you. Then imagine the shape your body takes when you are with this person, and slowly start taking that shape. Stay in that shape for a while and observe your body. See if you are relaxed or tense. Observe your breathing. See how you feel in this situation.

The therapist puts his hands on the solar plexus of the client (frontal and back part of the body). He will ask the client where he needs support. The client can lean on the hand of the therapist.

The therapist moves away the hand that is in the front of the solar plexus, from the client's physical body to the energy field. The client feels support from the ground and the therapist's other hand. The client will try to feel expansion and safety.